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Mohd. Safar Hasim

## **Establishment Of Japanese-Owned Newspapers In the Straits Settlements Prior to World War II: Its Impact On The Press Laws In Malaysia.**

The establishment of several Japanese-owned newspapers in Chinese, Japanese and English in Singapore before the Second World War led to the introduction of additional stringent press regulations in the Straits Settlements. The setting up of these newspapers, especially in English, was viewed by the Government as a Japanese propaganda effort to win over the Chinese in Singapore to the Japanese side. And as such they would be anti-British. The Government's response was to amend existing press law. There was nothing in the law then to enable the government to revoke any newspaper already in publication.

In the amendment, a landmark provision was included stipulating that no newspaper could be published without a permit. The permit could be approved, rejected or revoked or given out with certain conditions at the discretion of the Colonial Secretary. Newspaper could also be directed to be published in a language stipulated in the permit. Earlier in 1920, another landmark was established when licensing of the printing press was introduced. These two provisions continue to be used until today in Malaysia. This article will not be concerned with whether propaganda effort took place, rather on the response of the Government to what was perceived as propaganda effort with the resultant enactment of stringent provisions in the press laws.



## Propaganda Through Newspapers

The Special Branch of the Straits Settlements Police began to keep tab on the Japanese activities in Malaya (i.e. in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States) after World War I. This could be the earliest time the tab began to be applied based on records at the Public Record Office, London.<sup>1</sup>

In 1938, several newspapers could be associated with Japanese propaganda, namely *Singapore Nippo*, *Nanyo Nichi Nichi* and a news agency called Eastern News Agency or in Japanese, *Toho Tsushin Sha*. From early 1938, *Singapore Nippo*, published news in English in its column from time to time. Then, from March 23, 1938, the newspaper began publishing weekly edition in English which was distributed free, while the Eastern News Agency began issuing free news sheet from October 25, 1938 in English and Japanese. On January 12, 1939, the other Japanese newspaper, *Nanyo Nichi Nichi* began publishing news briefs in Chinese in its regular newspaper. On January 21 and January 23, 1939 *Singapore Nippo* and *Nanyo Nichi Nichi* published the full speech of Japanese Foreign Minister (Mr. Arita) in Japanese and Chinese.<sup>2</sup>

The activities of the Japanese in Singapore did not escape the attention of the Special Branch of the Straits Settlements Police. After compiling a study of the situation, the Director of the Special Branch, E.E. H. Beck, informed the Colonial Secretary of the Straits Settlements on July 5, 1939 about the Japanese propaganda activities.<sup>3</sup> The report included a detailed study of contents of news in the newspapers and the news agency. The study included *The Singapore Nippo*, *Nanyo Nichi Shimbun*, *Nanyo Oyobi Nihonjin* (weekly), *The Singapore Herald*, *Singapore Nippo* (Chinese edition - weekly), *Eastern News Agency Daily Bulletin*. *The Singapore Herald*, *Singapore Nippo* (Chinese edition) and *Eastern News Agency Daily Bulletin* were launched within the last eight months with the specific objective to provide Japanese propaganda.<sup>4</sup> The Eastern News Agency was operated for Japanese Consul General by Domei correspondent in Singapore and appeared to give "inspiration to the other local Japanese newspapers."<sup>5</sup> Although the Japanese newspapers subscribed to Reuters for other news but "basically Japanese journalism is Eastern News Agency."<sup>6</sup> Daily studies carried out during the previous two months by the Special Branch showed that the tone of the Eastern News Agency Bulletin changed from "comparatively temperate



propaganda to intemperate and hysterical denunciation of British democratic policy".<sup>7</sup>

The report contained a collection of news abstracts of the Eastern News Agency Bulletin viewed as "*objectionable*" and divided into three classes, namely:

- A. Statements designed to disparage or discredit Great Britain or make the British "lose face".
- B. Materials likely to give the Japanese a handle to use against Great Britain.
- C. Statement believed to be not in accordance with the facts.<sup>8</sup>

The report suggested that a reasonable definition of "*objectionable utterances*" might be "statements to which the average man would object". The Special Branch held the view that whereas the local British press and foreign press published outside Malaya might be entitled to criticise and decry the British Government and the politics and activities of the British Empire, "it behoves a foreign press instituted on British soil to couch its criticisms with due restraint and consideration for the country whose hospitality it enjoys."<sup>9</sup>

The report said the study indicated a state of mentality and lack of discretion which cannot be overlooked by Government without loss of prestige. It recommended that the printing licence issued to the Eastern News Agency should be withdrawn forthwith, and permanently. It added that the lesson should prove effective.<sup>10</sup>

The British viewed the main reason for Japanese propaganda in Singapore as an effort to win over the Chinese from supporting Chiang Kai-Shek. At that time the Chinese were considered to be anti-Japanese and pro-British.<sup>11</sup> The propaganda plan for Singapore was under the direction of one Kodam Kenji in Japan. In a letter dated November 5, 1938, probably intercepted by the Special Branch, Kodam wrote that "the way to win over overseas Chinese is to publish extracts to the effect that the Chinese in China are grateful to the Japanese Army who, under new puppet Governments, are protecting the lives and property of Chinese."<sup>12</sup> Kodam's direction was carried out and various statements to that effect — believed to be entirely false — were being printed in local Japanese newspapers, according to the Special Branch report. It

was further decided that *Singapore Nippo* would turn its English edition into a daily and for that it was given a Yen 10,000 subsidy a year. *Singapore Nippo* too would publish weekly four-page edition in Chinese under the guidance of the Japanese *Consul General* and Ohara. It would begin publication from Chinese New Year, February 20, 1939.

Based on the Special Branch report, the situation then was something like this:

*Singapore Nippo* published weekly edition in English. *Singapore Nippo* also published from time to time items in Chinese in its daily edition. Eastern News Agency published news in English two times a day.<sup>13</sup> Special Branch also expected that by February 20, 1939 *Singapore Nippo* and Eastern News Agency would be sharing the same office at Robinson Road. *Singapore Nippo* would publish English edition on a daily basis and Chinese edition weekly; the Eastern News Agency would be issuing news twice daily in English and, possibly in Chinese.<sup>14</sup>

Singapore was already recognised as very vital in the defence of the British. This could be seen in the naval installation and the stationing of armed forces there. In fact, Singapore was nicknamed a fortress. Straits Settlements Governor Shenton Thomas in his letter to the Colonial Office tried to impress upon it about the presence of a large Chinese alien population there. He said what was not generally known was the presence of a very large population of alien Chinese who were under no obligation to Great Britain even though they might now appreciate the advantages of British rule.<sup>15</sup> In the 1931 census report population in Singapore was 567,453 of which 421,821 were Chinese. While for the whole Straits Settlements there was a total of 663,518 Chinese population of which not less than 408,389 were Chinese-born. In 1939 the population was larger, and the proportion of aliens was not less than in 1931. Governor Thomas felt that it was obvious these people would not be allowed to be subjected to anti-British or pro-Japanese propaganda.<sup>16</sup>

In Cyprus, Malta and Palestine (then under the British), there were laws dealing with the press. These countries were



troubled by disturbances. But Malaya was free from such troubles. However, Governor Thomas argued that: "when potential trouble exists it is better to provide against it than to wait for it to break out." <sup>17</sup>The Governor then laid out his idea on how to overcome the problem.

He said: The legislation which I desire to enact should provide that no newspaper may be issued without a licence, which licence would specify the terms and conditions (one of those terms and conditions being the language of publication), and that the licensing officer should have the power to refuse a licence, or to cancel it, at his discretion if any of the conditions are broken. An appeal against the licensing officer's decision might be allowed to the Governor-in-Council. <sup>18</sup>

When the Superintending Consul in Shanghai, A. G. N. Ogden, made a stop-over in Singapore on his way for home leave in England, Governor Thomas discussed with him the problem of Japanese propaganda in Singapore. He was informed by Ogden that the regulations in Shanghai were imposed because Shanghai was an International Settlement and breaches of the peace must be avoided. Thomas' reply to that was Singapore was a naval base, the safety of which was of Imperial concern. <sup>19</sup> The naval base cost £60,000,000 and 20 years to build. <sup>20</sup>

At about the same time the Straits Settlements Government received two requests for facilities to receive news from overseas; namely from Trans-Ocean News Service, a German news service, and a request from Singapore Herald to receive news from Domei Agency, a Japanese news agency. Both these applications were refused. Governor Thomas wondered whether "there was any truth in the report that Germany, Italy and Japan were combining, or discussing the possibility of combining, for the purpose of disseminating news and propaganda favourable to the totalitarian States." <sup>21</sup>

## **The Setting Up of Singapore Herald**

The setting up of Japanese-owned non-English newspapers went on quietly and only attracted the attention of the Special Branch. However, the setting up of *The Singapore Herald*, an evening English daily, attracted the attention of not only the Government but also the newspaper industry, especially the English newspapers. It became a catalyst for Government action. Established English newspapers (owned by British inter-



ests) called upon the Government to take drastic action. Editorial comments made by the English newspapers publicly, and information provided by certain members of the English press directly to the Colonial Office could have influenced Government decision into taking drastic steps to provide with more stringent provisions regarding newspaper publication.

The setting of *The Singapore Herald* was a scoop of sort for *The Singapore Free Press*. In a report on March 20, 1939 headlined "New Daily Newspaper for Singapore: Tokio Fund Behind Herald", *The Singapore Free Press* said *The Singapore Herald* would be published by Japanese interests to disseminate Japanese cultural ambitions in this part of the world.<sup>22</sup>

It said the staff of the newspaper included a young Japanese editor, trained in the United States, an Englishman sub-editor and several Indians and Eurasian journalists. The newspaper would follow the American style of news presentation. It would be an evening newspaper. It would be printed by a modern rotary printing machine. The newspaper also reported that opinion was split among journalists in Singapore whether the newspaper would be successful. Majority believed that its survival without big financial assistance from Japan would be slim.<sup>23</sup>

Several days later, on March 26, 1939, the weekly edition of *Singapore Nippo* in English announced the coming of *The Singapore Herald*.<sup>24</sup>:

#### *The Singapore Herald*

An English language afternoon daily Newspaper, concise and complete containing all the vital news of the day within its 8 pages. Comprehensive news of the world by cable news services, thorough coverage of Singapore and Malaya event. A new Newspaper new in format, new in style, and.... news of interest to Malayan through Malayan viewpoint, edited by a man who knows Malaya. By Malayan. Half the number of the editorial staff are Malayan born. The other half has been in Malaya average of 11 years. Malayan capital have been invested in an enterprise which is giving employment to Malaysians. Soon *The Herald* makes it debut early next month. Have it delivered by courier or mail.

*The Straits Times* in its editorial on March 29, 1939 entitled *Japanese Kultur* referred to the announcement about *The Singapore Herald* saying that the announcement did not say



who was behind providing the capital for the newspaper.<sup>25</sup> It said that as a commercial venture *The Singapore Herald* did not attract attention. But the editorial thought the Japanese Government was keenly interested in the project. It also knew that the Japanese Consul General felt there had been a "lack of understanding" of Japanese policy among existing newspapers. It assumed that the purpose of *The Singapore Herald* would be to display that appreciation of Tokio's aspiration which the newspapers lack.<sup>26</sup>

*The Straits Times* also touched on the editor of *The Singapore Herald*, which according to the paper was an American-educated Japanese journalist, by the name of Hosagawa whose aim would be to make known in this part of the world Japan's "cultural ambitions". He would be assisted by an English sub-editor and several locally-engaged Asiatic journalists.<sup>27</sup>

Dismissing business jealousy, *The Straits Times* editorial sounded a grim warning. It suggested that out of small beginnings in the form of this new Japanese sponsored daily newspaper there might arise a very serious problem for the governments of the Straits Settlements and the Malay states. The newspaper added that it knew quite enough about Japan's "cultural ambitions" and her methods of making known in the Far East to regard her propagandists as unwelcome visitors to this country. It quoted in the same editorial a Reuters message from Shanghai as examples of Japan's "cultural ambitions": "Japanese controlled Chinese-language newspapers are waging a violent anti-British campaign. Such slogans as 'Destroy British Goods', 'Confiscate British Property', and 'Drive Out All Britons' are being splashed in heavy type across front pages. An American missionary from Nanking states that the Japanese controlled newspapers there are appealing to employees of British concerns, including the consulates, to leave their posts."

The editorial contended that any successful attempt to convert the masses of Malaya to the Japanese point of view must in some measure weaken allegiance to the British Crown, which at that time "Malaya is blessed with unbounded loyalty to the Crown." What would be the value of this great fortress (i.e. Singapore) if the loyalty of the civilian population were undermined over a period of years, and an acute hostility substituted for the present peaceful friendliness? The editorial asked what would be the answer if British interests sought



permission to publish in Tokio a newspaper printed in Japanese and aiming at making Great Britain's "cultural ambitions" better known in that part of the world?

The last point (about British interests in setting up newspapers in Japan) was taken up again by the *Straits Times* in an editorial on April 5, 1939. It said there was no possibility of such a request being made, because under an Order in Council issued recently, British journalists could only set up publications in English. The editorial did not mention which Order in Council it was referring to. But there was a King's Regulations made under article 209 and issued under article 212 of "The China Order-in-Council 1925" which could be cited as "The Licensing of Newspapers Regulations, 1938".<sup>28</sup> One of the provisions limited the British Subject or Corporations in the printing and publishing of newspapers to English language; for any other language, written permission had to be sought and obtained from the British Ambassador.

The editorial was trying to ask the Japanese Government to reciprocate by instructing its citizens that any publishing activities in British territories must be confined to the Japanese language.<sup>29</sup>

The editorial said there were methods whereby any projected publication of whatever nationality can be prevented from making an appearance in this Colony, or suppressed after it had been established. It mentioned the Printing Presses Ordinance, the Penal Code, the Seditious Publications Ordinance and the Official Secrets Ordinance. Nevertheless, the editorial did not mention the fact that the printers of English newspaper (owned by British interests) in the Straits Settlements were excluded from the operation of the Printing Presses Ordinance. The editorial said it was vital that local authorities should possess complete powers to suppress any attempt at propaganda that might endanger the tranquillity of the state.<sup>30</sup>

Once again the editorial urged that the Japanese be denied the opportunity of increasing understanding of Japan's, what it now called "cultural aspirations", if only to retaliate against "bestial campaign" which was going on in those parts of China that had fallen under the control of their compatriots.

On April 10, 1939, Mr. Shohei Nagao replied to the two editorials in *The Straits Times*. The reply, in *The Straits Times*, in



point form is listed below:

1. *The Singapore Herald* will not be a propaganda organ and neither the "Tokio Government" nor any other government is supporting it.
2. Neither I nor any other member of my staff has ever said anything about "making Japan's cultural aspirations better known in this part of the world."
3. *The Singapore Herald* will try to present concisely, world and local news of interests to Malaysians. Cable service will be provided by the London offices of International News Service, which is an American concern, surely not subversively inclined, and by British Official Wireless and Eastern News, whose credit lines have appeared in your publication.
4. The Government of the Straits Settlements is, without doubt, zealously interested in the welfare of its citizens and their relation to *The Singapore Herald* without the editorial warning of *The Straits Times*.
5. By inference you seem to preclude the possibility of *The Singapore Herald*, as yet unpublished, being anything but a propaganda organ.
6. *The Singapore Herald* does not presume to assume responsibility for policies of newspapers in Shanghai or elsewhere.
7. Mr. Kosokawa, of my staff, is an American and is registered at the American Consulate-General and with the Registrar of Aliens as one.
8. *The Singapore Nippo*, published daily, is in the Japanese language.

While the Straits Settlements Government communicated officially with The Colonial Office in London about the ongoing situation, the Colonial Office itself also received information from other sources. This was through two senior staff of *The Straits Times*, G. W. Seabridge and G. R. Tonkin, regarding the setting of *The Singapore Herald*. Seabridge prepared the report in Singapore and passed to Tonkin in London. Tonkin wrote to Seabridge on April 19, 1939 enquiring about the setting up of *The Singapore Herald*, possibly at the request of A. Ridgway, Colonial Office Publicity Officer.

In his reply on 28 April 1939, Seabridge informed him the person responsible for the setting up of the newspaper was



Japanese Consul General Issaku Okamoto, who had served in the United States. There he met a journalist named Hosagawa, who received his journalism training in Chicago and said to be an American citizen.<sup>31</sup> Hosagawa was appointed editor of *The Singapore Herald*. The publisher of the newspaper Shohei Nagao, said to be the dummy owner of the newspaper, had lived in Singapore for a long time and before that he printed and published a small English weekly and a small daily in Japanese.<sup>32</sup>

Seabridge said Nagao denied receiving any Government support. But Seabridge was assured by the Special Branch that the money for the project had been supplied not from Tokio, but from Formosa. He could not speak with any certainty regarding the amount available but said the original idea was an allocation of \$2,000 (Straits) per month. He noted that every advertisement carried in the paper was Japanese. No other trader use the Herald for fear of boycott by the Chinese but Japanese traders were told that if they do not support the venture they will be reported to Tokio as "unpatriotic".<sup>33</sup>

Seabridge noted that so far *The Herald* had trodden very warily. According to him there were evidence to support the belief that it was part of Japan's policy to weaken the British position in this country by causing dissatisfaction among the masses. But Seabridge did not provide any sort of evidence. That *The Singapore Herald* will remain as colourless as it is at present no one believes for a single moment, and it is quite clear that while the policy of Tokio remains as it was any publication which is wholly pro-Japanese must to some extent be anti-British.

## **The Government's Response**

The setting up of *The Singapore Herald* caused the Government to find ways to control the publication of such newspapers. In fact, the English newspapers were the first to suggest that such publications be controlled or even denied publication. At about the same time, the Special Branch was monitoring the situation closely. Its report to the Governor would have an impact. One way to tackle the problem was to impose language requirement.

In his report to Tonkin, Seabridge said the Government gave serious attention when it was first announced. However, there was some reluctance to take action under the Printing



Presses Ordinance, as it happened so soon after protests by the Japanese in Singapore whose house were subjected to police check. Under the Ordinance, action could be taken against the printer of the newspaper. No direct action could be taken against the newspaper as the Ordinance then did not have the provision for it. Several members of the Government and at least one unofficial member in the Executive Council, according to Seabridge, felt some actions should be taken.

The Attorney-General's idea was that legislation should be enacted empowering the Government to decide in which language printed propaganda should be allowed.<sup>34</sup> If that could be done *The Singapore Herald* could be told that it could only be printed in the Japanese language, as such it would limit the propaganda activities to the Japanese nationals only. Personally, Seabridge felt the restriction on language was the most satisfactory solution of the problem.<sup>35</sup>

Seabridge described *The Singapore Herald*, at the time of his writing, as not very particularly dangerous. However, the potential danger was enormous and the precedent it created would make it very difficult for the Government to take action if Nazi or Fascist money should be sent to Singapore to subsidise publications in English, Chinese or Malay designed to undermine the loyalty of the Asiatic population.<sup>36</sup>

Even Reuter service, which supplied news to the Herald, was not spared. Reuters began servicing *The Singapore Herald* after International News Service provided just one day service to the newspaper. What was curious to Seabridge was why the premier British news agency, recently in receipt of a subsidy from the British Government, making an income out of a Japanese propaganda undertaking that was working in a British colony in opposition to the best interests of Great Britain. *The Singapore Herald* started off with a print run of about 4,000. At the time Seabridge wrote the report, it was less than half of that figure. Readership campaign was concentrated on the Asiatic clerical population.

In a subsequent letter Seabridge wrote directly to Ridgway, the Publicity Officer of the Colonial Office, dated June 20, 1939. Seabridge said recent development in connection with the Singapore Herald... "tend to increase misgivings as to the dangers which may result if the project was allowed to continue."<sup>37</sup>

From the point of view of other newspapers, *The Singapore Herald* presented no problem whatsoever. Its circulation in



Singapore was still not more than about 800 and quite a number of these were given away. Its advertising revenue was derived entirely from Japanese firms, the great majority of whom did not advertise and had never advertised elsewhere.<sup>38</sup>

Another American-born Japanese holding American passport joined the Herald apart from Editor Hosokawa. As American citizens, they would not fall under any ban that might be imposed on Japanese nationals. Seabridge took to task that the two American-born Japanese journalists spent a great deal of their time in the offices of the Japanese Consulate-General at Singapore, even though they would deny their newspaper had any propaganda purpose and disclaim all connection with the Japanese Government department. Seabridge saw in a comment by the Japanese Consul-General Mr. I. Okamoto to Mr. D.S. Waite of *The Singapore Free Press*, that he would tell *The Herald* to pay a certain English-born journalist more salary, giving rise to suspicion that a certain connection existed between Okamoto and *The Herald*.<sup>39</sup> But could Okamoto said that in a lighter vein.

There was very little effort to increase the sales of *The Singapore Herald* in Singapore, and this was apparent. Attention appeared to be concentrated upcountry, in the Malay States, and the support of Indians was being sought particularly, including the appointment of Indian correspondents in scores of remote country places. Seabridge feared that these semi-literate correspondents might have their minds poisoned against Great Britain and be tempted to work against British interests while acting as newspaper correspondents. Unlike the Chinese, the Indians in Malaya have no particular hatred of the Japanese nor was loyalty to the Empire beyond question.

Once again Seabridge urged most strongly what steps should be taken to curb the activities of these people, even before any serious offence against the laws of this country can be proved.

Senior Officials at the Colonial Office appeared to be divided on the matter. A. N. Galworthy, commented in a minute dated May 24, 1939, that it would be most unpleasant if large sections of this population (Asiatic clerical) were won over as a result of a subtle and long-term campaign; though the danger was lessened by the fact that subtle press propaganda does not appear to be a Japanese speciality. Though the local reaction so far seemed healthy enough.



Another Colonial Office officer felt what the Straits Government was afraid of was a riotous split in Chinese political opinion in Malaya. The intention of the Japanese was to seduce Chinese sympathies away from the existing wholesale loyalty to Chiang Kai Shek (with all the moral and material help that means to him) and bring the Chinese in the South Seas over to support the puppet regimes in Kwangtung and occupied parts of China.<sup>40</sup>

What Britain wanted to achieve in Malaya was sufficiently clear that was to prevent propaganda calculated (and designed as far as the Japanese were concerned) to disturb (a) the peace and good order of Malaya (b) good relations with friendly power. The latter was particularly difficult since Japan was a friendly power itself, and was nevertheless the target in Hong Kong and in Malaya of the worst bitter vituperation in the local English Press.

However, another officer said: "This is not much at present to excite us about this."<sup>41</sup>

One officer commented that there seemed to be a tendency in the Straits, "to create 'Japanese menaces' out of next to nothing and to fashion annoyances for the Japanese without even plausible pretexts."<sup>42</sup>

But in Singapore the Government was very concerned. When the Herald on July 27, 1939 printed a caption story of a poster which were pasted widely, Governor Thomas immediately informed the Colonial Office because such action was viewed as *deliberate propaganda and mischievous in its intent*. Moreover other newspapers did not print the incident as news. Governor Thomas said the publication was viewed at unofficial opinion as very *offensive*.<sup>43</sup> The licence-holder of the printing machine, printer of the newspaper, was warned by the Colonial Secretary and if such action was repeated the licence would be withdrawn immediately under the *Printing Presses Ordinance (Cap. 208)*. Governor Thomas took the opportunity to point out the need for an early action to have a direct control over the newspaper itself (rather than through the printer) as suggested in the *despatch* of July 25, 1939.<sup>44</sup>

On June 9, 1939 a meeting was held at the Colonial Office to discuss Governor Thomas' proposal to enact legislation to control newspapers with a view to oppose Japanese propaganda in Singapore. In attendance were three officers from the Colonial Office, two officers from Foreign Office and the



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pared to if it was to be read second or third time, and at the same time this would give the Straits Settlements Government more power to use when the need arose.<sup>50</sup>

The law was presented to the Legislature in August 1939 and passed on October 1939. A new Section 6A that was introduced contained 8 items. Under section 6A(1) It was stated that the law requires the publisher to have a permit to publish newspapers. Such permit would be given at the discretion of the Colonial Secretary. The Colonial Secretary could grant, refuse or revoke, or grant subject to conditions to be endorsed in the permit.

The language requirement was provided in Section 6A (2). The section provides that the Colonial Secretary may direct that the newspaper be printed in such language as specified in the permit and he could also impose a bond to be executed to secure payments of any penalties which may be imposed upon the proprietor or editor of the newspaper under the Ordinance or any other written law.<sup>51</sup>

*The Nanyo Oyobi Nihonjin* was suspended as from 25 November 1940, <sup>52</sup> probably the first Japanese-owned newspaper to have been taken such an action. This paper was described as for "years (has) been definitely anti-British". The Japanese Consul-General was reportedly pressing for the removal of suspension.

In 1941 the Police Special Branch noted a change in the tone of the *Singapore Herald*. It had quietly omitted news unfavourable to Japan, had been denying the existence of any crisis over the French Indo-China-Thailand dispute, and had been stressing the interviews which Mr. Shigemitsu had been giving in London, and representing them as though Great Britain was again "appeasing" Japan, instead of warning her.

The Special Branch also noted that *The Singapore Herald*, which had always made a point of reporting in full everything connected with the local Indian population, went to considerable lengths on one occasion to record its sympathy with the Tamil "underdog". The Selangor correspondent of this paper, R.H. Nathan, who is also sub-editor of the *Tamil Nesan*, Kuala Lumpur, had been active in formenting a strike of Tamil rubber estate labourers in the Klang District, and was arrested on a Banishment Warrant on 5 May 1941.<sup>53</sup>

*The Nanyo Nichi Nichi* ceased publication on 1 October 1941. In 1938, when the question of subsidising a newspaper



for propaganda purposes was considered, this paper was originally proposed.<sup>54</sup> *The Singapore Nippo*, however, was preferred. *The Nanyo Nichi Nichi* was at times definitely anti-British and Pan-Asiatic.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

The laws passed during the inter-war years continued to be used after the Second World War, initially under the Malayan Union established in 1946. In 1948, after the formation of the Federation of Malaya, a uniform press law called the Printing Presses Ordinance, 1948 was enacted to cover the two former states in the Straits Settlements, four Federated Malay States and five non-Federated Malay States which made up the Federation. The individual states then had separate but almost similar press laws. In The Printing Presses Ordinance 1948 two provisions stood out — the licensing of the printing press, and publication permit for newspapers. Several amendments in the press laws took place since 1948 but the two landmark provisions were retained. These provisions can be seen in The Printing and Publication Act 1984 which combines the former Printing Presses Act, and Control of Imported Publications Act 1959. In 1987, further amendments took place, but the two landmark provisions remained.

The establishment of the Japanese-owned newspapers in Singapore before the Second World War contributed to one of the landmarks provisions, but its impact continued until today.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Attempts to read some of those files which should have been opened were not successful because the documents concerned were not in the files, or with notes in the files saying that the documents were returned to original departments. If some of these materials are available, a more indepth picture would appear regarding Japanese involvement in the press activities in Singapore. Nevertheless, based on materials studied thus far, a good picture could still be formed regarding Japanese involvement in the press in Singapore and Malaya, and as a result the Government of the Straits Settlements took stringent actions to curb Japanese influence using the press.



<sup>2</sup> CO 273/658/50616, Letter from the Governor of the Straits Settlements to the Secretary of State for the Colonies Harold MacDonald dated 8 April 1939. See Enclosure 1 "Japanese Propaganda".

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> CO 273/658/50616, Report of the Special Branch of the Straits Settlements Police dated 5 July 1939.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> CO 273/658/50601, Minute of Meeting of the Colonial Office, London dated 12 June 1939 Entitled: "Japanese Propaganda in Singapore".

<sup>12</sup> CO 273/658/50616, Letter from the Governor of the Straits Settlements to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> F. Spencer Chapman, *The Jungle is Neutral*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1963. p.23

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<sup>22</sup> CO 273/656/50376, *The Singapore Free Press*, New Daily Newspaper in Singapore: Tokio Fund Behind Herald, 20 March 1939.

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